

Letter from the editor: When Volunteering, You Learn Something New Every Time

Posted: Monday, October 3, 2011 9:56 am

Last Sunday, I volunteered at the wonderful Thousand Springs Festival near Hagerman. My shift was during the final few hours of the festival, and my assignment was parking duty.

I'll let that soak in for a moment.

My job was to make the grand "go that way" gesture to the final few cars who rushed out just before closing time and point them towards the sea of vehicles they were clearly supposed to park near.

Considering that there were precious few vehicles arriving that late, I reconfigured my job description to be "wave goodbye to every car leaving the festival."

So, if you were headed back to town at 4 p.m. on Sunday, and a goofy-looking fella in an undersized orange vest was wagging his arms at you for no reason, you don't have to worry — your admission fees didn't go towards paying him.

But, parking duty aside, I learned a few things while spending the day at the festival.

Never trust someone in an orange vest:

When I pulled in that afternoon, I rolled my window down next to an orange-vested man directing traffic. "Hi," I began. "I'm volunteering. Where do you need me?"

He stared, and blinked. "Ummm," he began, foreshadowing the level of detail inherent in the coming answer. "You can pretty much just park anywhere, and head in."

Not very helpful, I thought.

An hour later, I was in his shoes.

As I stood in the sun, resplendent in my orange vest, festival patrons kept soliciting my advice. "Excuse me," said a woman leaving the parking lot. "If I head right out of the parking lot and go south — do I get to Vader Grade?"

"Boy, are you asking the wrong guy," I replied, unsure of whether Vader Grade was a road or the opening band at Diamondz in Jerome. "I'm not sure I could find my way back to Twin without my smartphone."

Not very helpful, I could read in her exasperated glare.

But, as the afternoon wore on, and people kept asking for directions, I learned the best way to answer the question, "Does this road lead back to the Interstate?"

"Yes. Yes, it does," I bluffed. Hey — I had at least a 50 percent chance of being right.

Even in a desert, there is paradise:

I lived in South Carolina for about three years. It was a place of hanging Spanish moss, lush greenery and exotic flora. A land where the spiders didn't just hide in your shoes — they wore them.

It's a world apart from the semi-arid desert that flanks the Snake River. But, after descending deep into the canyon to Ritter Island, an entirely different ecosystem comes to light.

Water gushes from the canyon walls. The banks of the narrow channel of the Snake River here are bursting with vegetation, and the thick canopy of trees blocks most of the sunlight. It almost felt humid.

It was a far cry from the subtropical climate of the Carolinas — it was even better, knowing what a rare treasure the area represents to the valley.

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The newspaper reaches far and wide:

As I was standing at the dusty top of the Thousand Springs Grade, waving at the cars with all the authority a guy in an orange vest can muster, I spotted something at the entrance:

A yellow Times-News newspaper tube.

And I was humbled that, 36 miles away from our newsroom, on this country road with a disparate group of houses alongside it, a car stops by this very spot at the crack of dawn every day to deliver these words and so many others.

To the person who relies on the contents of that newspaper tube, whether it's for the coupons, the classifieds, the news articles or the Family Circus — thanks for reading.

Josh Awtry is the editor of the Times-News. He now knows where Vader Grade is. Just don't ask him how to get there.